

# FOR THE LOVE OF IVY

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By Jackie French Koller

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“It’s only for a year, remember,” Daddy said gently. “Then Mommy will be back, and we can all go home again. I just need Nana’s help with your baby brother right now.”

Tears were trying to squeeze out of Jennie’s eyes, but she wouldn’t let them. She had to be brave, for Daddy’s sake. She knew how he worried about Mommy being a soldier. It would only make him sadder if she told him how much she missed Mommy, how much she missed her best friend, Lucy, and how she missed their little yellow house with the swings in the back yard.

“You’re going to do just fine,” Daddy added.

“I know,” said Jennie.

“Come along, Jennie,” said Ms. Cary with a big smile. She took Jennie’s hand in both of hers and squeezed it tight. “I think you’re going to like being in my class.”

A sea of faces turned to look at Jennie and Ms. Cary as they walked through the classroom door.

“Class, we have a new student,” Ms. Cary announced.

Suddenly, a dark shape emerged from the back of the room.

“A puppy!” Jennie cried.

The puppy wagged its tail and ran up to Jennie.

“Class,” said Ms. Cary, “please tell Jennie who this is?”

“Ivy!” everyone shouted at once.

Jennie reached out and stroked Ivy’s head. Ivy’s fur was like black silk. Her eyes were as warm and brown as melted chocolate. Jennie bent down, and Ivy gave her a big, wet puppy kiss. Jennie giggled. She had found a friend!

“Her name is Ivy!” Jennie told Daddy that night. “She’s a Guiding Eyes puppy and the whole class is raising her!”

Daddy looked happier than he’d looked since Mommy went away. “That’s wonderful, Jen,” he said.

And it was wonderful! Jennie never knew school could be such fun! She worked extra hard at her lessons, so she could help train Ivy. Ivy was learning to be a companion for a blind person. She had to learn basic commands like sit, stay, come, and lay down. She had to learn to do special things for her master and she had to learn to watch out for herself as well.

“Ivy’s master won’t know if he is about to step on Ivy’s tail or slam it in a door,” Ms. Cary explained, “so Ivy must learn to keep herself safe.”

Even school lessons were fun! Ivy wandered around while the students worked. Somehow, she always seemed to know if someone was sad or needing a hug. Whenever Jennie started

missing Mommy or Lucy or her little yellow house, she would feel a bump at her elbow and there would be Ivy. Ivy would cock her head and perk up her ears and look so concerned. Then, if Jennie smiled, Ivy would stick out her pink tongue and smile back.

“Dogs don’t smile,” Daddy said.

“Ivy does,” said Jennie. “She’s the smartest dog in the whole wide world!”

Sometimes Ms. Cary took Jennie on outings with Ivy. Ivy would wear her “Guide Dog Puppy in Training” cape. Whenever her cape was on, Ivy knew she was working and she would be calm and obedient. But when Ms. Cary took her cape off, Ivy loved to romp and play just like any other puppy. Her favorite game was stealing scrunchie’s out of Jennie’s hair. Round and round, they would chase until at last Ivy would let Jennie catch her and they would play tug of war. Ivy always won, proudly prancing off with the soggy, stretched out scrunchie dangling from her mouth.

Jennie loved her so.

Weeks and months passed, and Ivy grew bigger and stronger and smarter. Then one day Ms. Cary made an announcement. “The day that we’ve been preparing for has come,” she said. “Tomorrow Ivy will take her Guiding Eyes test. Won’t we all be proud when Ivy graduates and becomes a real Guiding Eyes dog!”

Ms. Cary’s voice sounded cheery, but her eyes looked sad. Jennie felt a bump and looked down. There was Ivy looking up. She knew Jennie’s heart was hurting.

“Jennie,” Ms. Cary said later. “You and Ivy share such a special bond. I thought you might like to come with me to watch her take her test tomorrow.”

Jennie rubbed Ivy’s head. “I’d like that,” she said.

“I don’t want Ivy to pass her test,” Jennie confided to Daddy that night. “I want her to fail so she can stay with us.” Tears spilled down Jennie’s cheeks.

Daddy smoothed her hair back from her face.

“What about the blind person who is waiting for a Guide Dog?” he asked. “That person needs Ivy.”

Jennie swallowed hard, longing to feel that familiar bump at her elbow. “I need Ivy, too,” she said.

Daddy gave her a hug. “You know, Ivy reminds me a lot of Mommy,” he said. “They both trained so hard, and they both have such important jobs to do...”

Daddy didn’t say anything more, but Jennie knew what his silence meant. She thought quietly about Ivy and Mommy.

“Okay,” she said at last. “I won’t wish that Ivy fails, but... if she fails anyway, would it be okay to be happy?”

Daddy laughed and tousled her hair. “Sure,” he said, “but don’t count on it. She’s the smartest dog in the world. Remember?”

At the Guiding Eyes School, the next day a handler named Amber took charge of Ivy. “You can watch from a distance, Amber told Jennie and Ms. Cary, but try not to distract Ivy in any way.”

Amber tested Ivy on all her basic commands and Ivy did everything perfectly. Jennie couldn’t help but be proud! Then came the harder tests. Amber walked Ivy through an obstacle course. People made loud noises and sudden moves. Sometimes Jennie jumped, but Ivy didn’t.

“She’s doing great!” Ms. Cary whispered.

Next it was time to take Ivy out on the street. Once again, Ivy did everything right. Amber's smile was growing wider. She praised Ivy over and over again. At last there was only one test left. Amber took Ivy to the railroad station.

Ms. Cary squeezed Jennie's hand. "This is a very hard and very important test," she said.

Amber walked Ivy to the very edge of the train platform. She turned Ivy so she would be facing the oncoming train, then she made Ivy sit.

"Stay," said Amber, but as soon as she turned to walk away, Ivy popped right up again. Amber frowned.

"No, Ivy," she said. "Sit!"

Ivy sat, but she seemed very anxious.

"Stay!" Amber commanded, but once again, as soon as Amber moved, Ivy popped up.

Ms. Cary looked down at Jennie and shook her head. "This isn't good," she said.

Jennie watched as Amber made Ivy sit once more.

*And then she saw what was wrong.*

Ivy's tail was not secure! It was hanging off the platform and she sensed that it could be in danger. Jennie's heart raced. Amber and Ms. Cary hadn't noticed. If Jennie didn't say anything, Ivy would fail.

"Stay!" Amber commanded, very sternly this time. Then she turned and walked away.

Ivy sat, but she was so nervous that her front legs were trembling. From a distance there came a whistle and then the train roared into sight. Ivy stood, moved forward a few inches, then sat again as the train whizzed by, just inches from the platform edge.

Amber shook her head and wrote something on her paper.

Ms. Cary sighed. "I'm afraid that's it for Ivy," she said.

Jennie swallowed hard. Ivy was failing, even without Jennie wishing it. Would it be so wrong to keep silent? Jennie felt like her heart was a scrunchy, being all stretched out in a tug of war. Then Jennie saw Ivy watching Amber intently, waiting for praise. Ivy had done everything right. How could Jennie let her think she had failed? Jennie cleared her throat.

“It was her tail,” she said quietly.

Ms. Cary looked down. “What?” she asked.

“Ivy’s tail was hanging over the edge of the platform,” said Jennie. “That’s why she wouldn’t stay.”

Ms. Cary’s eyes flew wide. “Of course!” she cried. “Come on. We’ve got to tell Amber.”

“Ivy!” said Amber, once she realized what had happened. “What a smart girl you are!” She rubbed Ivy’s head and praised and praised her.”

Ivy wiggled so with joy and pride that Jennie couldn’t help but be happy for her.

That night Mommy called home.

“Daddy told me what you did for Ivy, Jen,” she said. “I’m so proud of you.”

It felt good to make Mommy proud, but it still hurt to lose Ivy. The next morning when Jennie walked into Ms. Cary’s room, she couldn’t look at Ivy’s empty crate. She kept her eyes toward the front of the room.

“I have some wonderful news, class!” said Ms. Cary. She looked directly at Jennie.

Jennie bit her lip, fighting back tears. Then there was a bump at her elbow. She looked down into a pair of sweet brown eyes.

“Ivy!” she exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

“That’s my news!” said Ms. Cary. “Ivy scored so high on her tests that she is not going to be a Guide Dog!”

Jennie stared at Ms. Cary in confusion. Ms. Cary laughed and clapped her hands. “Ivy’s going to be a Breed Dog and have Guiding Eyes puppies instead.”

Ms. Cary came over and knelt beside Ivy. “And best of all,” she added, hugging Ivy, “she gets to stay with us!”

The whole room went crazy, clapping and cheering.

Jennie’s heart swelled with joy.

“Ivy!” she whispered breathlessly.

Ivy cocked her head and perked up her ears.

“You’re staying!” Jennie shrieked.

Ivy stuck out her pink tongue and smiled.

#### Afterword

For the Love of Ivy is based on the true story of a very special black Labrador Retriever named Ivy. Ivy was raised to be a Guiding Eyes dog by Ms. Jeannie Cardany and two of her second-grade classes at Cocksackie Elementary School in Cocksackie, New York. As in this story, Ivy performed so well on her tests that it was decided that she should be a breed dog instead of a guide dog. The incident about the tail is true. This is called intelligent disobedience - when Guide dogs deliberately disobey for the safety of their masters or themselves. The summer after her tests, Ivy gave birth to seven healthy pups, four of which went on to become Guide Dog pups. Ms. Cardany and her classes helped raise Ivy’s daughter Dell, and many of Ms. Cardany’s students plan to raise Guide Dogs themselves one day. As for Ivy, after

becoming a mother, she went on to a new career. Her extraordinary empathy made her the perfect candidate to be a therapy dog. Ivy visited hospitals and nursing homes and brought joy and comfort to people who were sick or sad. She lived with Ms. Cardany and attended the second grade at Cocksackie Elementary School for the rest of her life.

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